**SAINT BONAVENTURE**

**His Theological Relevance**

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI addressed a message to the participants in a colloquium on the “Theological Relevance of Saint Bonaventure,” which gathered some fifty experts at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, reported Vatican Radio in French (Cyprien Viet).

Joseph Ratzinger’s second post-doctoral thesis, in 1956, was, in fact, on the Theology of History in Saint Bonaventure (1217?-1274); a session of the colloquium was dedicated to it. In fact, the full works of the Pope Emeritus now include a translation in Italian.

Father Federico Lombardi SJ, President of the Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI Vatican Foundation, read a letter addressed by Benedict XVI to Belgian Jesuit Amaury Begasse de Dhaem, Professor of Theology at the Gregorian.

Greeting the organizers of this colloquium, in the context of the eighth centenary of the birth of Saint Bonaventure (the date varies according to different sources between 1217 and 1221), Benedict XVI expressed the same intellectual enthusiasm. “When I received your invitation, I had just finished reading once again Fernand van Steenberghen’s book on the 13th century and, in comparing it with the subjects of the symposium, I saw at the end with satisfaction how, in the decades since then our knowledge on the 13th century has truly grown and deepened, precisely also in relation to the “Seraphic Doctor,” Bonaventure.

He affirmed notably that “awareness of the depth of Bonaventure’s figure and of the richness of perspectives of his thought has augmented considerably.”

He recalled his catechesis of March 10, 2010, on Bonaventure’s refutation of the theories of another Franciscan, Joachim of Flora, saying: it “appeared clearly that Joachim of Flora was not only an outsider to extravagant ideas, but that the meeting of his thought with the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi did, on the contrary, open new perspectives that join the profundity of theology itself.”

“The recognition, important rightfully for Bonaventure, [of the fact] that love constitutes a force of knowledge in the darkness of the intellect, represents a completely different vision of man in relation to the position of Saint Augustine,” explained Benedict XVI.

Thus, for Benedict XVI, the Symposium’s program reflected the enrichment of research on Saint Bonaventure, and he expressed his conviction that it will help to understand what the Franciscan thinker of the Middle Ages has rightfully to say to us in this particular historical moment.

“I rejoice over what I might learn from the reading of the texts, even if I certainly can’t read the entire and powerful Opus that the program pre-announced,” confided the Pope Emeritus, with his gratitude and best wishes.

We recall also that on September 6, 2009, the Bavarian Pope went in the steps of Saint Bonaventure to Bagnoregio, some eighty kilometers north of Rome.

He also dedicated to Bonaventure one of his catecheses during a general audience on March 3, 2010. (See Feature: Saint Bonaventure: [sfo24/bonaventure.doc](http://sfo.franciscans.org.au/rulesconst/sfo24/bonaventure.doc)).

He commented on Bonaventure’s life of Francis of Assisi, summarizing thus the heart of his spiritual theology: “The essential point: Francis is an *alter Christus [another Christ]*, a man who sought Christ passionately. In a love that pushes to imitation, he conformed himself entirely to Him. Bonaventure indicated this living ideal to all of Francis’ disciples.”

**An Ideal for Today**

Pope Benedict pointed out this ideal to today’s Christian, quoting John Paul II: “This ideal, valid for each Christian yesterday, today and always, was indicated likewise as a program for the Church of the Third Millennium by my Predecessor, the Venerable [Saint] John Paul II. This program, he wrote in the Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, is focused on Christ Himself, whom one must know, love, and imitate, to live in Him the Trinitarian life and to transform history with Him until its fulfilment in the Heavenly Jerusalem” (n. 29).

Pope Benedict recalled in French some biographical elements, notably Bonaventure’s links with France, at the moment of his studies, but it’s also in France that he died and where he rests. “Saint Bonaventure lived in the 13th century. Man of action and of contemplation, of profound piety and prudence, he contributed to form the harmony between faith and culture. A student at Paris, he was fascinated by the fervour and evangelical radicalism of the Friars Minor and asked to enter the family of Saint Francis’ disciples. Then, he pursued his studies at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Paris, and he became one of the most important theologians in the history of the Church.”

**Seek His Face**

“All his thought”, stressed the Bavarian Pope, “was profoundly Christological.” In a writing entitled *Evangelical Perfection*, he showed that the Church is made more beautiful by the fidelity of her sons and daughters who, by the grace of God, are called to observe the evangelical counsels and thus witness that the Gospel is the source of joy and perfection.”

His biography of Saint Francis should help to keep alive the founding charism: “When Bonaventure was elected Minister General, the Order of Friars Minor had 30,000 members, scattered throughout the West. In order to ensure communion, he presented Francis’ genuine charism and his teaching in a biography where we find the most faithful portrait of the holy Founder.”

“For Bonaventure, Francis is a man who sought Christ passionately and who conformed himself entirely to Him. May this idea be also a program for the Church of the Third Millennium and for each Christian!”, Benedict XVI hoped, who concluded inviting each baptized person “to seek the veritable face of Christ,” to “conform” one’s existence to Him.

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